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TAGS: [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [PINS](#) [AG](#) [EI](#)

SUBJECT: IRELAND TO CONSIDER EXPANDED ISAF CONTRIBUTION

REF: STATE 186256

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Jonathan Benton; Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Ireland, a NATO Partnership for Peace member, is committed to maintaining its presence in ISAF (now four officers and three non-commissioned officers in Kabul), but would have to consider contributing additional personnel in the context of constraints on Ireland's current and planned peacekeeping activities, said Colm O Floinn, Deputy Political Director and Security Affairs Chief at the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), to DCM and Pol/Econ Chief in a December 13 follow-up discussion on reftel points. O Floinn agreed with DCM's remarks and Riga Summit statements that the stabilization and development of Afghanistan was an international priority and a litmus test for NATO. O Floinn observed that Ireland also had national interests at stake in this endeavor, given knock-on effects of Afghanistan's situation for Irish society, such as in terms of crime (a likely reference to rising levels of local heroin use). He cited positive feedback from ISAF partners regarding the value of Ireland's ISAF contingent. O Floinn added that the Irish Government had just renewed a 6-month commitment to maintain its ISAF contingent in place and that DFA strongly supported Ireland's continuing presence in Afghanistan.

¶2. (C) Responding to reftel's call for Irish additions to ISAF, O Floinn said the Irish Government would have to consider strains on Ireland's participation in other peacekeeping operations. (Ireland caps the number of soldiers that can participate in overseas missions at 850, and, under the so-called "Triple Lock Mechanism," such participation must have a UN mandate and Irish Government and Parliamentary approval.) He noted that Ireland had recently bolstered its UNIFIL force to 158 and would have roughly 300 troops in Kosovo with KFOR and 60 in Bosnia with EUFOR by next summer. Moreover, the Irish Government Cabinet had recently approved Ireland's participation in the Nordic EU Battlegroup, with a likely contribution of 100 personnel in 2007. (This decision still requires parliamentary approval, which is expected.) O Floinn noted that Ireland would pull roughly 330 soldiers out of UNIMIL by next summer, but that this force and related materiel would need rest and could be called upon for other African missions in the future. O Floinn commented that Irish active peacekeeping troops represented not only a sizable proportion of Ireland's Defense Forces, but also a significant component overall of the international missions in which they took part. Ireland was also considering joining EU civilian-side programs to strengthen policing in the Balkans and Afghanistan.

¶3. (C) Without making any commitments on Irish ISAF numbers, O Floinn offered his personal view that a modestly expanded force in Afghanistan would offer advantages for Ireland. He cautioned that the Irish Government would not likely consider

personnel assignments to eastern or southern regions of Afghanistan, but he ventured that a few additions to the Kabul contingent might be in line with the Irish Defense Force's own program to develop personnel and operational capabilities. O Floinn continued that a modest personnel increase might also position Ireland's ISAF contingent to access a larger share of the intelligence that is now shared among U.S. forces and ISAF's largest NATO contributors. He also believed that the Irish Defense Forces would presumably have a stake in raising its public profile in Ireland with a modest increase in Afghanistan, as Ireland's peacekeeping activities were a source of national pride. O Floinn said that he would forward reftel request to DFA's highest levels, and, again speaking personally, he recommended that the Embassy reach out to the Irish Department of Defense's civilian leadership on additional ISAF contributions. (Comment: Post has begun this outreach and is turning reftel points into a formal letter to DFA and the Department of the Prime Minister (Taoiseach) that will request additional Irish personnel for ISAF.)
FOLEY